How to Write a Composition.

By Margaret E. Sangster.

ONE day in the early summer, it was my great good fortune to be invited to what was called "A Composition Reading" in a girls' school of high character and wide reputation. It was a pretty sight that greeted my eyes. The girls of all ages, from 10 to 18, were dressed in white, and their sweet faces and lovely manners entitled them to be called, if ever girls deserved the name, winsome school-girls.

The programme of the morning included essays in English composition, written by members of every class in the school, from the lowest to the highest. There was great variety both in subjects and in treatment. Full play was given to originality, and no two compositions were alike. The teacher who had charge of the work told me that so far from disliking to write, the girls loved the exercise, and that the classes were the most popular in the curriculum.

I don't know how it may seem to the girls whom I am talking with today. They may enjoy writing compositions or they may dread and dislike this part of school duty. It depends a good deal on the way one begins, whether one likes or dislikes anything. If one is called upon to write a composition on a topic which does not interest her, and which she knows absolutely nothing about, she cannot expect to find much fun or much interest in so dry a task. The important thing is to have something to say. Composition is the art of having something to say, and saying it agreeably, with due regard to the rules of good English.

If one wishes to excel in this branch of education, one must first of all be willing to take great pains. If I were teaching a group of girls, I would say: Write your theme at the top of your page, then stop and ask yourself what you know about it. If you are to write the story of a journey, go back in memory to the day you started, and tell in an orderly fashion the various steps you took, by what train or boat you traveled, what incidents arrested your attention on the way, and how you were impressed when you arrived at your destination.

There are people who go through the world as if they had no eyes. They see little, because they do not look. The one who looks around her will find interesting incidents in the shortest walk, or drive, or trip by train. In describing a place or a jaunt there is this to be remembered, that you wish to fix the emphasis on the strongest points, and slide over without mention little details that are simply commonplace. For instance, it is not necessary to say that the conductor came through the train and took up the tickets. As everybody knows, conductors always do this. But if you had an experience that I once had, on a leisurely train, in a southern state, when the conductor signaled the engineer while some of the lady passengers went out of the cars and gathered flowers by the roadside, you might tell about it. In other words, tell of the unusual, not of the ordinary.

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If your composition is to be historical, and its central figure is one of the country's men of renown, as, for instance, George Washington, Robert E. Lee, or some other man whose deeds have passed into history, you would best read what you can find about the man and his period. On no account write your composition with the book you have read before you. As you read make notes, if you choose, so that you may be accurate when you mention a place or a date, but put wholly aside before you begin to write the volume you have been consulting. You wish to write your composition in your own words, not in the wrods of an author whose volumes are in the library. Do not waste time in a long introduction. Begin at the beginning, tell where your hero was born, where he attended school, and what happened about the time that he entered public life. This is not difficult in the case of the Father of His Country, and every American girl should be so familiar with his life that she can write a creditable composition on George Washington.

Perhaps your teacher will ask you to make an abstract of an interesting book which you have lately read. Here, again, ask yourself what pleased you most in the book or the story, and which of the characters was the most entertaining? Try to tell the story briefly, taking from it the important points and omitting much of the conversation and the minor episodes. One of the most prominent American authors, a man whose name is famous wherever English is spoken, puts the entire substance of a long novel into three pages of note paper, before he begins to write his book. If an author can do this in composing the framework of a novel, a school-girl writing about the book, when she has read it, may learn how to sketch the story the same way. Doing this gives splendid practice in writing English.

Your composition may take for its subject an act in one of Shakespeare's plays, or it may weave itself around a text of Scripture, or a sentiment from poetry. Whatever the subject, sit down before it and gaze at it until it takes shape in your mind, and your thoughts begin to answer it, as the key on the piano responds to the touch of your finger.

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Every school-girl should learn how to write a letter. A business letter should be straightforward and lucid, telling precisely what one wants, in the fewest possible words. A letter written to the home people, when one is absent, should be very much like a pleasant bit of talk. It should not take for granted that the absent know all that is going on; it should tell them every trifle. Above all, it should answer any questions they may have put in letters they have sent.

In old times there were pet phrases with which people began their letters, such as: "I take my pen in hand to write a few lines," or "Having a half-hour to spare this afternoon, I thought I could not spend it better than in writing to you," etc. These phrases have quite gone out, and are not at all necessary. Begin your letter as you would your composition, at the beginning. Let your letter represent you. Use the same words you would if you were sitting face to face with your correspondent.

No girl will ever excel in writing compositions who is not fond of reading good books. The more one reads, the better one will write. As we read, words and sentences form themselves into part of the furniture of the mind. A good style is gained, not so much by constant writing, as by thoughtful reading. Read the books you like. Read books that have to do with what you are studying. Read Tennyson and Shakespeare and Longfellow and Emerson.

Time spent over good books will be well spent time for girls who long to write cleverly and forcibly.

A Confession.

(Washington Star.)

"Rafferty," said Mr. Dolan, "do yez t'ink the labor question will iver be settled?"

"Not with me," was the answer. "If I only had to work wan hour a day I'd be tempted to sthrike fur fewer minutes an' more pay."

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN.

Many Medical "Discoveries" of Modern Times Well Known.

(London Lancet.)

The pancreatic duct, the discovery of which is attributed to Hoffman and Wirsung (1630), is mentioned by Eudemus, a contemporary of Galen. Again, Alcaeon, who lived in the fourth century before Christ, rrefers to the auditory duct, which afterward bore the name of eustachian tube. The same thing has occurred in therapeutics. Many remedies that were employed in remote antiquity fell into disuse and were again introduced into practice at a later date. Thus arsenic was used as a febrifuge by Lentillus, and Hippocrates recommended it for cancerous affections. The most recent researches have resulted in the employment of arsenic for the same purpose in the form of organic componds—e. g., the cacodylates and arrhenal. Pythagoras recognized the diuretic value of squill, but its use lapsed for a long period.

Opium has been found in the dwellings of the inhabitants of the lake villages of Switzerland, as well as in ancient Egyptian tombs, but afterward it appears to have been forgotten during several centuries. Hippocrates employed this drug freely as a sedative, and afterward it had a vogue in the Middle Ages. Even Paracelsus did not scruple to use this vegetable drug in th case of on Kornel von Lichtenfels, who had vainly tried other practitioners without being cured. Paracelsus speedily effected a cure, but it is of interest to note that the patient refused to pay the fee which had been agreed upon before the treatment was begun. The case was tried before a court at Basle, with the result that the fee was reduced to a few florins. This so angered Paracelsus that he reproached the judge, and so brought about his banishment and the loss of the chair which he occupied in the university. A remedy known to Galen was the male fern, which after the lapse of centuries was brought to the notice of Louis XIV by a quack.

In surgery it is no less true that some of the methods employed by modern advanced surgeons were known to the ancients. Thus Hippocrates mentioned intubation of the larynx and Coelius Aurelianus gave instances of the successful operation of tracheotomy. Phaxagoras ventured to perform a laparotomy and employed intestinal sutures. Operations for hernia were performed 250 B. C., and Serapion removed diseased kidneys. Puncture of the thorax in empyema was rediscovered in 1650, after having been forgotten apparently for centuries. That the practice of asepsis is not entirely modern is shown by the fact that contemporaries of Hippocrates were in the habit of dipping their instruments in boiling water.

In the thirteenth century it was customary before operating to administer to patients by means of sponges placed to the nose the juices of sedative plants —e. g. stramonium, belladonna and mandragora, consciousness being regained by the application of vinegar compresses. Among other methods of treatment now in vogue hydrotherapy, gymnastics and the open air treatment were practiced by the Romans and Greeks. Hypnotism was thought highly of by the priestly physicians in the temples of Isis in ancient Egypt. Perhaps one of the oldest forms of medication is organotherapy, which after a period of decline has again come into vogue. In medicine and surgery, as in all the arts and sciences, methods become general, then lapse into disuse, to be revived possibly at a later period, and then to achieve a popularity which attaches to a supposed new thing.

Nature Notes.

(Chicago News.)

Extermination such as was the fate of the dodo and the great auk threatens the birds in the great penguin rookeries of Macquarie island and the desolate Auckland islands, near New Zealand. Dr. E. A. Wilson, the assistant surgeon of the Discovery Antarctic expedition, has pointed out that for some years past the unscrupulous speculator has derived a considerable profit from the preparation of penguin oil, obtained by throwing these helpless birds by the thousands into the melting pot and boiling them down. No less than 100 tons of this oil so procured has recently been placed on the market. Encouraged by success, a scheme now appears to be afoot whereby caldrons are to be set up on the Auckland islands to facilitate this traffic. Hitherto the rookeries o fthese islands have suffered comparatively little, but once the caldron fires are lighted it is thought that they will not be suffered to die out till the last survivor of the host is slain.

In burrowing his tunnels the mole seems to swim through the earth rather than to dig his way. Although much of the earth is never removed from the runs, but is beaten hard into the walls and floor of the tunnel, the creature finds it more expeditious in busy times to clear the runs of loose earth. This he does at a point where the run comes to the surface by pushing the earth before him with his flat forehead and face. Sometimes, where the earth binds easily, he pushes out the mold in solid round plugs, showing the exact dimensions of the orifice through which they have been thrust. When the mole is hunting or traveling underground he has no need to throw up the earth. This is a subsequent operation for the purpose of cleaning the runs for regular use.

"Elephants in Uganda have a peculiar aspect that I have not noticed elsewhere," writes a traveler. "They cover their bodies, as a protection against flies, with the bright red volcanic dust contained in the soil. This gives them a remarkable appearance, as, instead of being a slaty gray, as in the Nile valley, their color, when thus covered with dust, resembles that of a chestnut horse."

Little Ships of the Air

Oriole in the Apple Tree.

"We would have you to wit that on eggs
though we sit
And are spiked on a spit, and are baked
in a pan,
Birds are older by far than your ancestors are,
And made love and made war, ere the
making of man."
—Andrew Lang.

OUT on the apple tree an oriole is putting on his water-proof coat, the water-proof coat which birds have worn—I was going to say since the world began—but that would be inaccurate. More correctly he is waterproofing his coat, for birds know a trick by which even their most travel-worn garments may be made every bit as good as new in respect to either beauty or utility.

As far as scientists may judge, birds wore fur before they wore feathers, and, perhaps, scales before they even got as far as fur. But, of course, at that time they were not really birds—they were reptiles.

The earliest point in their history at which one feels any safety in beginning is the period at which that which we now call bird, but which was then a reptile, began to climb trees. This may have been because he had enemies he desired to avoid; perhaps there were dainties upon which he regaled himself at the top of the tree; or possibly the dim silent forests of the voiceless world palled on him, and to pass time, he and his brothers instituted a game of tree climbing. A perilous amusement, especially if the wind blew! And where was the good of eluding his enemies if in the end he fell tothe ground and was killed. Or what advantage in filling his stomach or excelling his brothers if he were laid up so he could not crawl for a week. Merely for warmth these tree climbers had begun to indulge in a scant covering of something resembling either fur or down. There must have been dissatisfaction with this costume, and a general desire for improvement, because there came eventually a new family of tree climbers upon the scene. Tree climbers who displayed a zest and recklessness never before characteristic of the family, and who, if they missed their footing, no longer fell with a disagreeable flop, but floated down through the resistant air softly as vagrant thistle-down and calmly as does the man with the parachute. Simply because they had increased by tufts and bunches their original furry covering.

These parachutic descents were, it is supposed, the first attempt at flight. These extravagant bunches of down were the beginning of feathers. This periods the parting of the ways at which they said good-by to things that creep and are typical of meanness and subtlety, and began that long climb which changed them to things that soar, emblematic of innocence and aspiration.

Probably the next change substituted wings for fore legs. Some reaching out toward a neighboring tree, some need of comfort or safety, started that transformation which today makes of a 200-mile trip for food only an appetising experience.

It is a question when birds acquired beaks. Varied needs brought a variety of form; there are beaks which are strong, sharp and curved; others which are long and slender, and still others which are flat, spoonlike and sensitive.

Teeth were once as common to birds as to animals. Flight by increasing the circulation changed reptilian blood to the warm blood of bird life. An extraordinary feature of the respiratory system of the larger birds is the connection between their lungs and the hollow bones of their legs. This is so complete that a bird may breathe through a broken leg even though its throat be compressed. In birds of great flight a larger and more knife-like keel attaches to the breastbone; some have found it necessary to have four collar bones. There are never less than nine, and in some cases twenty-three, vertebrae in the neck. Wings bear a strange resemblance to arms. There is an upper and lower arm with elbow joint, wrist bones and an attempt at a hand. Upon the thumb grows a single feather called the "winglet;" on the fingers "pronaries." Short, rounded concave primaries indicate laborious flight. Long flat and firm speak of swiftness. Large, concave and softly fringed belong to stealth and silence. Next come the "secondaries" inserted in wrist and elbow; from elbow to shoulder are the "tertiaries." Tail feathers, acting as rudders are "rectices" or directors. Those short feathers which overlap as did the scales of bygone times, affording warmth and protection, are "coverts."

Master Oriole is still preening his feathers. To let you into his secret: he presses his beak or mandibles against the oil glands in what is commonly called the "pope's nose." Thus procuring the requisite oil he draws his feathers through his mandibles and restores their water-proof qualities and their gloss. Every bird his own valet! His little neck twists to reach every part of his body. Looking from him to the pigeons on the roof with their writhing iridescent necks positive heritage from ancestors that crept, hitherto unthoughtof resemblances, emphasize the declaration "birds are but glorious reptiles."

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